

REINDEER.



THE
LAND OF THE MIDNIGHT SUN:
SUMMER AND WINTER JOURNEYS
THROUGH
SWEDEN, NORWAY, LAPLAND, AND
NORTHERN FINLAND.

WITH DESCRIPTIONS OF THE INNER LIFE OF THE PEOPLE, THEIR
MANNERS AND CUSTOMS, THE PRIMITIVE
ANTIQUITIES, ETC.



By PAUL B. DU CHAILLU,
AUTHOR OF
"EXPLORATIONS IN EQUATORIAL AFRICA," "A JOURNEY TO ASHANGO LAND," ETC.
C.

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THE LAND OF THE MIDNIGHT SUN.

CHAPTER I.

Winter.—In the North a Sunless Sky.—Short Days in the South.—Beautiful Nights.—A Snow-storm on the Norwegian Coast.—Making the Land.—Christiansand.—Ferder Light-house.—Christiania Fjord.—Fog.—Slow Travelling.—Ice in the Fjord.—Christiania in Winter.

How great the contrast between summer and winter in the beautiful peninsula of Scandinavia—"the Land of the Midnight Sun!" In December, in the far North, a sunless sky hangs over the country; for the days of continuous sunshine in summer there are as many without the sun appearing above the horizon in winter. During that time, even at the end of December, which is the darkest period, when the weather is clear one can read from eleven A.M. to one P.M. without artificial light; but if it is cloudy, or snow is falling, lamps must be used. The moon takes the place of the sun, the stars shine brightly, the atmosphere is pure and clear, and the sky very blue. The aurora borealis sends its flashes and streamers of light high up towards the zenith; and there are days when the electric storm culminates in a corona of gorgeous color, presenting a spectacle never to be forgotten. I have travelled in many lands, and within the tropics, but I have never seen such glorious nights as those of winter in "the Land of the Midnight Sun." The long twilights which, farther south, make the evening and morning blend into one, are here succeeded by long dark nights and short days.

All nature seems to be in deep repose; the gurgling brook is silent; the turbulent streams are frozen; the waves of the lakes, upon which the rays of the summer sun played, strike

no more on the pebbled shores ; long crystal icicles hang from the mountain-sides and ravines ; the rocks upon which the water dripped in summer appear like sheets of glass. The land is clad in a mantle of snow, and the pines are the winter jewels of the landscape. Day after day the atmosphere is so still that not a breath of wind seems to pass over the hills ; but suddenly these periods of repose are succeeded by dark and threatening skies, and violent tempests. On the Norwegian coast fearful and terrific storms lash the sea with fury, breaking the waves into a thousand fragments on the ragged and rocky shores. Under the fierce winds the pines bend their heads, and the mountain snow is swept away and to immense heights, hiding everything from sight.

We will wander together, kind reader, all over the land—over snow-clad mountains, hills, and valleys, over frozen lakes and rivers—at times drawn by those “ swift carriers of the North, the reindeer ;” we will skirt the frozen Baltic, and go as far as the grand old cliff of Northern Europe, the North Cape.

On a dreary December day I was near the Norwegian coast, bound for Christiania. The weather was very stormy, the wind blowing a gale from the south-east ; snow, hail, and sleet fell alternately. We were nearing the desolate coast, to be wrecked on which was sure destruction. We steamed slowly ; the anxious and watchful eyes of the captain and of the pilot were turned in the direction of the land, and we all listened for the sound of the roaring breakers. We had on board, as passengers, a dozen sturdy Norwegian captains, who were going home to spend their Christmas : these men knew every inch of the barren shore. We supposed ourselves but a few miles from the city of Christiansand, our first stopping-place, and every time there was a lull in the storm all eyes were strained to get the first glimpse of the land. Just at noon the sky cleared, and the snow-clad mountains came into full view. The engines were stopped, to give the pilot time to reconnoitre. It was very difficult at first to make out the land, on account of the snow, but after a little while we found that we were abreast of the city. The captain could not have been more correct in his calculations ; and we finally

anchored before the town, completely sheltered from the outside sea and the gale.

After a short stay we left for Christiania. A marked change had taken place in the weather, which had become much milder; the wind had ceased, and it was getting foggy, so that the voyage became tedious. Fogs are prevalent on the fjords in winter and early spring, and days are sometimes required for a passage which in clear weather consumes only a few hours.

We lay at the entrance of the Christiania fjord until we saw the light-house of Ferder, and then slowly continued our way, stopping, slackening, or increasing the speed of the steamer as circumstances would permit. The end of the fjord was frozen for a few miles, the ice being nearly two feet thick; but a passage for the steamers had been kept open by means of steam ice-boats, which are kept constantly running. The water of Christiania fjord, on account of its position at the end of the Skager Rack, is colder in winter than that of the other fjords of Norway, the influence of the Gulf-stream being less felt. Navigation is generally closed at Christiania until March, though in very mild winters it sometimes begins later and ends sooner, and *vice versa*. The vessels were dismantled and imprisoned in the ice; people were walking to and fro on the frozen surface, some making their way on skates, others were moving on *kelke* (a little hand-sleigh), the occupant of which pushes himself along with two sticks, shod with pointed iron. At times several were racing with each other, or with the skaters, who were also going home. The men were busy cutting ice, a great deal of which is exported.

The city in winter has a quiet appearance, even when the Storthing is in session and the court is present. The quays are silent, and the numerous coasting steamers, with the loads of passengers, are missing, the travelling season being over. The hotels are deserted, and the amusements are few; now and then a concert takes place, or a theatrical company makes its appearance, and then the theatre is crowded every night. The skating places in fair weather are filled with young people, while children amuse themselves, as in America, by coasting down the hills.

CHAPTER II.

Christmas.—Festive Preparations before the Holidays.—Christmas-eve.—Feeding the Birds.—Even Animals are more Bountifully Fed.—Early Christmas Morning.—Some strange Old Customs.—The Festival in Christiania.—Dancing Round the Christmas-tree.—Distribution of Presents.—The Author is not Forgotten.—The End of the First Day.

CHRISTMAS is the greatest festival of Scandinavia. There are no holidays to which both young and old look forward with so much pleasure as to the days of yule—days which, in olden times, were also celebrated by the followers of Thor and Odin.

In the cities Christmas and the following days are legal holidays; but it is in the country that one should witness the rejoicings. In many districts of Sweden and Norway, among the peasants and farmers, these continue for thirteen days, and are called the “Tretten jule dage” (thirteen days of yule). Then, after a week’s interval, come—

“Tyvende dag Knut
Danser julen ud.”

(“The twentieth day Canute
Dances yule out.”)

This is the best time of the year for holidays—the season in which the farmers have very little to do, and the monotony of the long winter needs to be broken. The grain has been threshed, and the products of the dairy sold. The labor to be done is that of laying in supplies of wood and hay, the carpenter and blacksmith work, mending the carts, and repairing harness and ploughs. The dairy-work is lighter than in the summer, for the cows give but little milk, and the amount of butter is not more than enough for the use of the household; the women are busy in the daily routine of weaving, spinning, carding, and knitting.